

December 2020

Byline

Newsletter of the Canadian Authors Association - National Capital Region

*Because we write, no matter
what life throws at us*

*Maybe, at first
you couldn't
write anything.
You were too
stunned or
preoccupied.*

*Then, maybe,
faced with more
free time than
ever, you had
to admit that
while you had
always said, "If
only I had more
time to write,"
time wasn't the
problem.*



Artwork by Louise Rachlis: "Isolation 2020"

*Or maybe you
jumped right
in and finished
a long-loved
project.*

*Maybe online
connections led
to a beneficial
new writing
partnership.*

*No matter
what,
the pandemic
has been a
significant part
of our writer's
journey.*

PASS THE TEAPOT

By Louise Rachlis

Instant gas fireplace.

James Patterson novel.

White crocheted blanket.

The perfect workout
for minus 26.

Pass the teapot.

Writing Tip

MAKE THE MOST OF FEEDBACK

IN THIS EDITION

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[CAA-NCR Facebook Group](#)



[CAA-NCR on Twitter](#)

You know how it is:

You've laboured over a piece a writing—a poem or a story. Every word is perfect, as far as you can see. "Wait until they get a load of *this* gem of perfection," you say to yourself as you submit it to a writing circle, or a beta reader, or an editor.

And then the feedback comes.

Ouch.

Sometimes it's hard to take. But it's important to learn how to process critique. It's the only way to hone your writing skills.

When we respond to criticism, we go through stages, much like the five stages of grief as proposed by Elisabeth Kubler Ross and David Kessler.

- 1. Denial:** What does that person know anyway? They just don't get what I'm trying to do. It's perfect exactly as is.
- 2. Funk:** I am the worst writer ever. I will never learn how to do this. I should stop right now. If I didn't write, my house would be clean, my spouse would be happier, and I could watch an entire series on Netflix.
- 3. Re-evaluation:** Maybe I should play with their suggestions a little. Give them a try and see how they all work. They might be onto something.
- 4. Acceptance:** Their suggestions weren't half-bad after all. I left some things the same, but the changes make everything better. I'm pleased.
- 5. Satisfaction:** Writing is a challenge, but I feel good having written. Now, I can submit this work of pure genius to someone else.

6. Back to Stage One.

It's a roller coaster, but a fun one. Your writing will get better and better if you learn to recognize these stages and accept which one you're in at any given moment. Then you can know that the next stage is coming soon.

Your needs

By Arlene Smith

President, CAA-NCR

As an organization, we have a mighty task: We must stay current, satisfy the needs of a wide variety of writers across a broad geographical area, and engage as many of them as possible in meaningful content.

IT IS NOT EASY.

We do our best, but there is no one-size-fits-all for this. After every one of our gatherings, I take time to reflect on how it went. Each time I have to acknowledge that the meeting or workshop we offered would have given some members exactly what they needed, and it would have fallen short for others.

The falling short is hard to live with. Of course, I want everyone to be happy all of the time. That's not an achievable (or even desirable?) goal, but I can strive to keep the percentage of satisfied customers high.

The last nine months have probably clarified your writing processes and goals. You *know* what your next right step is. (You *do!*)

HOW CAN WE BE A PART OF IT?

The success and positive outcome of any organization depends on the feeling of satisfaction it provides for each member. Like a team, it requires good communication, mutual support, common goals, and fun! The board members of our National Capital Region branch want all of that. We would love to feel that everyone is taking full advantage of their membership.

- Are you seeking more connection with other writers? We can establish another writing circle if need be.
- Do you want to sell more books? Send us your information and we can add it to the [CAA Member Book Catalogue](#) on the national site. This page includes a place for your author bio and links to the points of sale of your books.
- Are you craving development opportunities? The CanWrite! conference will take place on Saturday, June 26, 2021. It will be at least partially virtual (the unpredictable development of COVID will determine exactly how the conference unfolds), and

How do you write?

How do you engage with others?

you can take part in the workshops, blue-pencil edits, and pitch sessions. The national conference never fails to provide something worthwhile for participants.

- If you have news to share, send it to the national office and they will include it on the [Member News](#) page of the website.
- And please, take advantage of the [webinars](#).

Wherever you are at with your writing, we have something for you. If you don't find what you're looking for, let us know. We would do our best to make it happen.

In the meantime, the winter of COVID continues. Make the best of it. Set time aside for writing. Put on a fire (or the fireplace channel!) relax, let the words flow. In this unusual time I'm so glad we are in this together!

Arlene



Winter in nature, but not in our hearts.

Pondering Santa

By Pat McLaughlin

Christmas is coming and right from the start
Children and adults must all do their part

The story of Santa Claus must clearly be told
So all understand what is about to unfold

For Santas add magic to the joyous occasions
Wearing red suits and white beards for all celebrations

The story was started by adults who found great delight
In spreading excitement which was surely their right

They told their offspring, Santa brings love and joy
And stockings and presents to every girl and boy

They encouraged their children to write Santa letters
Asking for toys, pjs, books and Irish Setters

Parents could read the letters and know what to get
For the presents requested were listed—and yet

The magic of Santa was found in the writing
It helped the children make their lists exciting

There were strings attached with the ribbons and bows
Children must be thoughtful and kind, as most everyone knows

Children know that using manners and being polite
Makes people happy so they try with all their might

Children want to believe in their parents' love and caring
And the important adults whose lives they are sharing

The story is about the magic that Santa Claus brings
The giving and caring, not all the consumer things

Christmas is coming and it's our job to impart
The joy and magic of Santa right from the heart



Join Us in January USE HUMOUR TO ENRICH YOUR WRITING

WITH PIERRE BRAULT

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

7:00 p.m.

via Zoom

—

No matter what type of writing you do, if you look deeply into it to search for the “funny,” you will discover something wonderful. Pierre Brault will draw from his experience as a playwright, actor and comedian to show how humour enriches creative work.

Contact:

NCRadmin@canadianauthors.org

EMBRACING WINTER

By Betty Warrington-Kearsley

One wintery morning in 1975, a Montreal newspaper headline read:

“THE COLD MAKES US STRONG,” says Prime Minister Trudeau.”

An elementary statement, but I remember it and still take heart from the late prime minister’s words.

While my first winter was bitter, especially as an immigrant from both equatorial Singapore and barely-below-zero winters in England, I was somehow relieved to realize that even our prime minister was not immune to the cold. His words invigorated me each time I dug out my car, doubly buried beneath heavy snow dumped by the overnight storms and city snow-plows clearing the roads.

When the aging, turbo-propped Yukon plane arrived from London, England, in January 1969, at Canadian Forces Base Trenton, we trooped off into blinding sunlight under a clear Mediterranean-blue sky into the Air Movements Unit.

Newly arrived in Canada, I was promptly embraced by a wind-chilled temperature of -35° C. My tweed suit, English overcoat and scantily lined dress boots were clearly inadequate for this degree of cold. Within the first week, gripped by a pressing sense of urgency, I sported a goose-down parka with a wolverine fur-lined hood, flannel-lined wool tuque, wool scarf, sheepskin mitts and Cougar boots with a warm red flannel lining and seriously serrated lugs that defied inadvertent slips. Now I began to look and feel Canadian. There is nothing like diving in at the deep end. Surviving that first winter in Canada in every possible way was paramount as I could begin to enjoy certain winter outdoor sports, especially Nordic skiing.

“When does spring begin?” I asked.

“After the maple sap runs,” I was told.

“When’s that?” I was delighted by this novel definition of spring, swiftly followed by another.

“Oh, about three weeks before the first Canada geese return. You gotta visit a sugar bush. Draw taffy in the snow. Enjoy great beans and pancakes with fresh maple syrup!”

I settled quickly into my new country, eager to

embrace and explore its customs, language idioms, and its unique cultural and seasonal characteristics. Not least, and most necessary to prepare for, were those of winter, which I encountered during one assignment in my career. That included daily excursions to visit housebound patients living far out in the small towns and villages beyond the boundaries of Ottawa. Unused to driving long-distances alone in snow, freezing rain, ice, and blizzards, I was somewhat nervous. This was long before internet and cellular phones existed. All I had then, to get me out of trouble, were a compass, bear claws, shovel and a map. I always carried a fully equipped survival kit in case, stranded in the boonies, I needed to wait for help. After several near-misses, side-winding downhill, and being pulled out of ditches by the kind, generous and willing assistance of strangers, I finally overcame my initial apprehension of winter driving. The pioneer spirit continues within us and continues to fortify us with courage, I thought, because of our winters.

It took many years of travelling back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean from England or Singapore to visit family before I could truly call Canada “home.” Each time, the parting would invariably leave me with a tinge of sadness for having to leave family, dear friends, and the shores of both these countries I had previously known so well and addressed as home.

About thirty years ago, returning from one such trip and looking down from the plane over what seemed the limitless vast duvet of snow punctuated by eastern Canada’s innumerable rivers and lakes, a heavy lump rose in my throat.

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I felt that same sadness, however it lingered for a few brief seconds only, to be replaced with a sense of excitement. A spurt of joy shot through my chest followed by a surge of deep happiness. I was thrilled and eager to be coming home, and now my country, Canada! “*Mon pays c’est ne pas un pays, c’est l’hiver,*” sang Gilles Vigneault. I wholly understand now what he meant. His words resonate across this land of snow and ice, and deeply into our hearts.

I arrived to Canada in the winter, and I’m writing this in winter, now 2019. Winter is truly Canada’s dominant character and identity.

Walking past my neighbour’s house last winter, Assad and his young son Ayaan were shovelling the packed snow-ridge deposited across their driveway by the city snowplows.

“The cold makes us strong, Assad!” I cheerfully called out against the icy wind. “That’s what our current prime minister’s father once said, way back in 1975!”

He looked up; his eyes were alight.

“You remember that? Wow! So true,” he said. “I recall him saying that too. Long time ago, but still so true.”

Winter Words

By Robynne Eagan

I am working with the HUMM publication on **Winter Words**, an idea still taking shape, focusing on writing about the concept of “Back to Better” (versus “Back to Normal”) after the pandemic.

It’s not a competition, although there may be some prizes, and we would love to publish selected works in the HUMM (either in print, online, or in our newsletter). We are seeking ideas and pieces of writing about the silver linings and new perspectives that have been exposed by COVID, or about the cracks in our society and social safety nets it has revealed.

Depending on the level of interest, it could also include a “Lockdown Writers’ Café,” that is, Zoom meet-ups or facilitated workshops, and online information about events, resources, writers’ webpages, local publications, book clubs, even coffee vendors! We hope to offer writers of all forms and genres, a platform and virtual meeting place.

If you have any ideas, links, resources, speaker or workshop proposals you would like to share, I’d love to hear from you. Contact me through [Winter Words](#).

CANADIAN AUTHORS
ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION
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Expedition

By Adrienne Stevenson

Previously published:

"Poets' Pathway: The Lampman Challenge",

Poets' Pathway Press:Ottawa (2018) p. 5

He checks – is she still sleeping? good, she is
as morning beckons with its pristine snow
the light of early morning thin and pale
his skis are ready, waxed the night before
in hopes that such a morning might appear

he leaves a loving note beside her head
saying the coffee's made – he'll be back soon
quietly turns the key to lock her safe
the car is huddled in its white duvet
feather-like drifts fall swiftly to the brush

he's on his way – nothing can stop him now
no traffic on this pearly weekend morn
just a few others heading to the hills
up the white roads as far as they can go
abandoning civilization while they can

finally here, in the stillness of the park
where hawks once rose on thermals at the cliff
and beavers built their mounds out in the swamps
a land abandoned to winter's frosty breath
just a few birds to show the land still lives

he's not the first – all the main trails are groomed
but there's a private path, not far along
he lifts a snow-clad branch that marks the way
it drops behind him, few can find it now
he breaks new trail – a hundred metres in

a clearing opens – ringed by snow-clad spruce
and birches dripping filigrees of ice
he rests a moment, leaning on his poles
drinking in the fresh, idyllic peace
and silence, frost and beauty everywhere.

Upcoming Meetings

Contact NCRAdmin@canadianauthors.org for information or registration.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

USE HUMOUR TO ENRICH YOUR WRITING, WITH PIERRE BRAULT

Pierre Brault will draw from his experience as a playwright, actor and comedian to show how humour enriches creative work.

BIO: Pierre Brault is best known for writing, performing and touring his multi-award winning solo shows. He has been GCTC's playwright-in-residence, and has appeared in numerous films. He has also worked extensively as a comedian touring regularly across Canada. Pierre is the recipient of the inaugural Audrey Ashley Award for his body of work contribution to the Ottawa theatre scene.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

MICROSOFT WORD FOR WRITERS, WITH MATTHEW BIN

Are you making the most of your writing software? Matthew Bin will share Microsoft Word tips and tricks to simplify and streamline your writing experience.

BIO: Matthew Bin is a novelist, non-fiction writer. He has more than twenty years' experience as a professional writer, producing technical documentation, marketing copy, and other business communications. He is the past national chair, communications chair, and acting membership chair of the Canadian Authors Association. He is also a Canadian football journalist, a licensed humanist marriage officiant, and bass player and backup shouter in a punk rock band.

FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021

7:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

NATIONAL CAPITAL WRITING CONTEST AWARDS

On the 100th anniversary of the first meeting of the Canadian Authors Association, we will celebrate the finalists of the National Capital Writing Contest

SATURDAY, APRIL 10, 2021

10:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Via Zoom

SCENE AND SUMMARY:

WHEN TO SHOW AND WHEN TO TELL, WITH TIM WYNNE-JONES

We use both scene and summary to weave together a story. Tim Wynne-Jones will lead us to find the right balance of scene and summary in the rhythm of our stories.

BIO: Tim Wynne-Jones is the author of thirty-seven books for people of all ages from picture books to young adult and adult novels. He has won the Governor General's Award twice and been short-listed six times, the Crime Writers of Canada Arthur Ellis Award twice and The Edgar Award of the Mystery Writers of America, once. His books have been translated into a dozen languages. For his contribution as a children's writer and educator he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada.

This recipe comes from Hannah Brassard Lahey at [HBlogs](#).

Read her thoughtful insights about mental health and wellness, and find some delicious recipes. Enjoy!

[Read more of Hannah's posts](#)

[Celebrating a COVID Christmas](#)

[The Pressure to Produce: Talking about Productivity](#)

Vegetarian Slow-Cooker Chili

From [HBlogs: Everyday Thoughts. Wellness. Food. Photography.](#)

By Hannah Brassard Lahey

Growing up, my mom would often make chili on Hallowe'en. It was easy and she could let it cook all afternoon while she got our costumes ready, the candy bags for the neighborhood kids sorted, and it was hearty enough to get us through a long night of going door-to-door. (There was also usually some left-over to warm us up after!)

This recipe is a great one for when you are heading out for the day and want to come home to a warm yummy dinner.

Here's what you'll need:

2 cans of beans (Red kidney beans and chickpeas)

1 can of diced tomatoes

1 tablespoon of tomato paste

1 medium onion (diced)

1 green bell pepper (diced)

1/2 to 1 cup of frozen corn

Grated cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese

Seasonings:

2 teaspoons chili powder

1/2 teaspoon curry powder

1 teaspoon paprika (sweet not hot)

1/2 teaspoon onion powder

Salt and pepper to taste

*Optional add red pepper flakes or some cayenne pepper if you want it spicy.



- Prepare all the ingredients, dice the bell pepper and onion. Make sure to rinse the canned beans to remove the excess starch and liquid from canning. Do not drain the diced tomatoes.
- Add all of your ingredients into the slow cooker pot. Stir thoroughly to combine.
- Add in all of your seasonings and mix thoroughly.
- Set to cook for 6 hours on high setting. I prefer doing 6 hours than 4, I find that the flavours come out more and the texture of the beans is nicer.
- Stir at least once half way through (at about the 3 hour mark) to ensure even cooking and flavour distribution.
- Once the 6 hours is up turn off the slower cooker, or leave it set to warm, and stir one last time.
- The last step is to grate some cheese to put on top of each bowl!

I love to serve this with warm bread or buns and lots of grated cheddar or Monterey jack cheese on the top. There is lots of protein and fiber in this recipe and it's very quick and easy to make. Also because it doesn't have any meat in it, it is even more affordable! All around an easy delicious cold weather recipe!

Ancient Tree in Winter

By Dr. Ian Prattis

Ancient Tree in Winter,
where did you come from?
Now trapped,
cleft by rocks at river's edge.
Water eddies carve your shape.

Ice mires your branches,
snow creeps fingers across the river
as your body disappears under deep laden snow.
Decaying sculpture of existence.

Death and birth are there.
Yet your journey carries you through,
While ducks stand on your broken limbs
Preening their feathers.

Did you once stand tall and majestic
in a soft Rideau River valley?
host to birds, small animals,
insects and whispering breeze?

Were you alone on a high bluff
shading thundering rapids
that pulled you to their embrace?

What felled you,
so that you now lie here
Trapped?

Cleft by rocks.

Exquisite beauty of my winter river walk.

Waiting for spring's flood
To set you free.



A Canadian Christmas

By Ramma Kamra

*We came from India 33 years ago,
planning to stay temporarily. But
Canada embraced us, and now I feel
I have not one home, but two.*

“Which one is Meera?” the immigration official at Halifax airport asked, without looking up from my passport

There was no particular expression on his face. Nothing to indicate whether we were welcome in Canada or otherwise. It was December 20, 1966—the dead of winter. I could see the scary heap of snow outside through the floor-to-ceiling glass panels. It seemed as if the airport crew had conspiratorially piled it in strategic places to frighten us.

I tried to appear confident, but felt nervous. Not because of the immigration official’s intimidating visage. It was because my husband had just paged me at the airport suggesting that we take the airport bus to the Lord Nelson Hotel where he would meet us.

Imagine being paged! And immediately upon one’s arrival in a strange country! I had never been paged before. So loud over the public address system! I felt as if everyone knew my name. As if they were staring at me.

My husband, who had arrived in Canada three months previously, had been staying at his brother’s place. On this particular evening, he had been babysitting his nephew and so had decided not to come all the way to the airport. We would rendezvous at the more conveniently located Lord Nelson.

No wonder I was caught off guard by the immigration officer. Such bad timing! He asked his question at exactly the moment when my mind was trapped in a complex arithmetical dilemma, trying to figure out whether the \$8 apiece that the Indian government had permitted us to bring would be sufficient for the evening.

How much would the bus cost? Would the children ask for something as outrageous as a glass of milk? How much would milk cost? What if it was extremely cold? Suppose we had to wait a long time for the airport bus? What if the kids caught pneumonia? What if the snow was slippery? What if one of us fell and fractured a bone?

The officer’s question was a jolt. I started wondering. Had we done something illegal, since he mentioned only my daughter’s name? Would he forbid her to enter Canada?

“Which one is Meera?” the officer repeated, looking up a centimeter this time. You see, we came from a metric country, where people had been looking up in centimeters since 1957. I felt smug at having arrived from an advanced country in that respect at least.

“It is I,” said my 12-year-old daughter, with a penchant for correct English. At another time, I would have burst out laughing at the artificiality of the manner in which she delivered those three words.

“Happy Birthday,” the officer said. “Thank you,” Meera smiled, totally taken aback. “How did you know?” “Your date of birth is in here, dear. In the passport.”

Dear? Did he say “dear”? We heaved a collective sigh of relief. He smiled too. I realized that Canadians were human after all, just like us.

We caught the 11:15 p.m. airport bus. They charged us \$3.75 each. My son, who considered himself something of a math wizard, noted, “Mom, what kind of country is this? Eighteen rupees for the bus?” He had made his first conversion of dollars into rupees. A Canadian dollar equalled five rupees at the time.

Back in India, when I had told my mother that a university library had offered me a job without having interviewed me, and at a whopping \$5,000 per annum, she was thrilled. Immediately converting the amount into rupees, she warned me not to brag about it to anyone else. That was her way of warding off the evil eye.

En route to the hotel, the view was heavenly. Christmas lights were everywhere. They were not dim and yellow like ours back home; they were bright and multi-coloured. A light snow had begun to fall, embellishing the view with a fairy tale-like aura. Every tree, every bush, every home and every balcony seemed to have hundreds of lights, not just a few dozen earthenware lamps as we used to light on Diwali night.

My husband welcomed us warmly. A scholarship that he had been hoping for had not materialized. He had determined to return to India, forfeiting his dream of a

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Canadian degree, but instead I had insisted on coming over to help as I had a job waiting. Meanwhile, he too, had found temporary employment.

Nothing else mattered. We were in the land of milk and honey. Life was pure bliss. The four of us were together again!

*

“Madam, I fully understand what you’re saying,” the employment officer said, “but rules are rules. I cannot issue you a work permit until we find that there are no suitably qualified Canadians willing to take [the job].”

I was at the employment office to obtain a work permit when I discovered that my employer had not cleared my appointment properly. The officer brushed aside my comments about how he need not fear that we would even dream of staying permanently in Canada. (Famous last words!) After all, I politely reminded him, my husband was on a student visa, and we three had only the visitors’ visas. We were certain about returning to India.

I began wondering how we’d support our kids in the meantime. I beseeched him to reconsider: “Please Sir, we have come all the way from India. I have spent my life’s savings on the three airfares. My husband is counting on me to support him in his studies.”

He listened calmly, but said, “Sorry Madam, that’ll be all. We’ll be in touch.”

The uncertainty during the ensuing period was grueling. It was excruciatingly tough on us. I blamed myself for insisting on being here. I also felt guilty for bringing the kids along. I had been unable to bear the thought of leaving them behind.

Although my husband had a job, the money started disappearing fast during the four weeks it took to clear up paperwork for my job, as we gradually began equipping ourselves for our first Canadian winter. We were fortunate that we could stay at my brother-in-law’s.

On February 1, we rented a small, furnished apartment for \$75 a month. The one bedroom had two single beds. There was a sofa bed in the front room. The front room was equipped to serve as a living room, kitchen and dining area. It was just a hop and a step from our place of work. The school was within walking distance.

My husband planned to study at the University of Toronto in the fall, so we left one of our incomes untouched for his education. We never considered ourselves poor. In the mid-sixties, \$5,000 could buy a lot of creature comforts for us.

I remember two instances of our self-sufficiency clearly. The first concerns a kind-hearted wealthy colleague of mine, who gave me one of her fur coats to better protect me from the cold. My family just couldn’t bear the thought of me wearing a hand-me-down. So I returned the coat with thanks, saying I couldn’t afford the \$35 required for alterations. To this day, I have a feeling she understood the real reason.

Second, in 1967, a Nova Scotian brewery visited our university campus to shoot a commercial with the “models” in front of various international backdrops. When my boss learnt that they were looking for someone to shoot in front of the Taj Mahal, she suggested me. The next morning I arrived bedecked in an evening saree. The shooting went well and I received a cheque for \$35, which was a lot of money at the time. But later I could not bear the thought of being in a beer commercial, worrying what my mother-in-law would think of me. It was inconsequential that she lived ten thousand miles away, spoke no English and did not own a television. I wrote a letter of apology to the company and returned their cheque.

That first winter felt dreadfully cold. At least we did our grocery shopping with our extended family members in their car. But laundry was another kettle of fish.

Each Saturday, the kids and I would stuff a couple of garbage bags with dirty laundry and march off to the laundromat two blocks away. The washer took a quarter and I’d fill it to the maximum. The dryer took a dime. After one drying cycle, the clothes would still be semi-wet, but I always chose not to spend another dime to dry them fully. Instead, with the money I saved, I preferred to buy the kids ice cream. Nothing ever felt as heavy to me as hauling those bags of semi-wet laundry over a two-block distance that winter and hanging them outside to dry.

But nothing really mattered much. We were here to build a future. I reminded myself that the Canadian winter was a temporary phase, knowing we’d soon be back in India.

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The year 1967 was Canada's centennial. For the love of God, I could not fathom how a country could be so young. We were caught in the frenzy of celebrations.

*

It was one of the many gorgeous mornings of our first spring in Canada. We were on our way to the apple blossom festival in Annapolis Valley with our relatives. En route, we parked to admire forget-me-nots and red trilliums. Gone were thoughts of snow. Gone were memories of India. I wore a brand new white silk saree. Having forgotten to put on any jewelry, I wandered off into the flowers, plucked two half-open buds and stuck them in my ears. My husband made me a tiny bouquet of multi-coloured flowers.

The valley seemed to offer an abundance of sparkle and shine. Apple blossoms were at their peak. We could smell their perfume. The festival queen looked gorgeous on a float in a setting of apple blossoms. The valley apple industry was a recurring theme, in the festival parade's floats. A huge crowd had come to watch. The chatter of children and families all around us was exhilarating.

I felt wonderful to be in a country blessed with so much beauty, so much prosperity. Such clean air! Such soothing sunshine! So many smiling faces. Everything so peaceful!

Then I felt a gentle tug on the hanging end of my saree. Upon turning, I saw a handsome, middle-aged Caucasian couple standing behind me. I smiled. They looked so tall, cultured and civilized.

The lady held her purse slightly open while looking straight into my eyes. "Take money and go buy your-self some regular clothes," she whispered, glancing disdainfully at my saree.

No one else seemed to have overheard her. And I did not have the heart to wipe the smiles off my kids' faces.

I trained myself to keep the matter secret. I never told a soul about this insult, until one day, 25 years later, in a sweat lodge during a multi-cultural awareness session, I burst into tears and related the experience to total strangers.

Each participant in that session cried and hugged me. Even in that emotional state, each of the Caucasian

participants said something like, "I'm so sorry," as if they were apologizing on behalf of the entire white race. The loud sobbing of many of the Indian and Inuit participants still rings in my ears.

*

Christmas 1967 was our first one with a real tree. Imagine a floor-to-ceiling tree in a tiny apartment. We had gladly paid \$10 for it. We still cherish the ornaments from that year as sentimental antiques, although hundreds of more expensive ones have come and gone over the years.

The rest, as they say, is history. Canada has been our country since 1966, during which time opportunities of all kinds have abounded around us. We have achieved what we set out to, and a great deal more.

Even today, I'm asked what brought us to Canada. Never having rehearsed a reply, I'm often at a loss for words. I stutter a variety of answers:

"We came to give our kids a better future."

"We came to improve our career prospects."

"It was the lure of adventure."

"We came for a better life."

They ask, "But what really prompted you to stay on?"

"Why do you ask?" I let them seek answers to this question within themselves. After all, this is a country of immigrants. I'll probably have a better answer when I'm no longer identified as a hyphenated Canadian. In the meantime, I have the joy of living in the best country in the world.

The best country or the second best? Even all these years later, I'm unable to decide which is the second best country in the world for me: Is it Canada, or is it India? Only if someone could explain the reasoning behind what I do each time I land in India. The moment I place my foot on that holy soil, I reverently bend, pick up a speck of dirt, and apply a tilak with it on my forehead. Does that make India the best country in the world for me?



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If you would like to see your poems, stories, photographs or artwork included in *Byline*, please [contact us](#).

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